

## Giant Swallowtail Butterfly



Egg on Prickly-ash





Larva





Adults



Prickly-ash

## Prickly-ash and the Giant Swallowtail

For the last forty years (on and off), I have searched for the larva of the Giant Swallowtail (*Papilio cresphontes*) which feed on Prickly-ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*.) Prickly-ash occurs in Tenhave Woods, Oakland County and I have seen adult Giant Swallowtails in the woods for many years. I was helping identify and measure trees in the swamp forest when I found three larvae, the first that I have seen. They resemble bird droppings. A few days later, I found another group of Giant Swallowtail larvae at a highway rest area in Genesee County. This seems to happen to me often, that once I find an insect or plant for the first time I will start finding it at other places.

Prickly-ash is not an ash but a member of the Rue family (*Rutaceae*) that includes the citrus. The odor of the flowers and fruit is similar to that of lime and the unripe fruit looks like a tiny lime. The plant is armed with prickles and a stand is painful to walk while doing fieldwork. The twigs and the main leaf stalk have prickles. Prickly-ash grows mainly in the Lower Peninsula but recently a few stations in the Upper Peninsula have been discovered.

The adult Giant Swallowtails have an impressive six-inch (15 cm) wingspan. When it alights on a flower, it continues to flap its wings, keeping the flower upright. The Giant Swallowtail ranges north to Saginaw. Go out and look for it in southern Michigan.

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